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LETTER DATED 7 OCTOBER 1997 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

In response to the request of members of the Security Council for an assessment of the current situation in Sierra Leone, I should like to inform the members of the Council as follows:

Since November 1994, when the then Head of State of Sierra Leone requested the good offices of the Secretary-General, the United Nations has worked closely with regional governments, the OAU and the OAU and the Commonwealth to help bring peace to Sierra Leone. United Nations cooperation and support have extended to: the restoration of democratic rule, the holding of elections, the conclusion of a peace accord, and efforts to move from peacemaking to peace-building. The Security Council has been fully engaged in this process and has issued a number of presidential statements.

The efforts of the United Nations and others to help put Sierra Leone on the path towards development grounded in democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, were derailed by the illegal coup that took place on 25 May 1997. The Security Council, the OAU Summit, ECOWAS, the Commonwealth, I, and others, have been unanimous in strongly condemning the overthrow of the democratically-elected Government of President Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and have called for the immediate restoration of constitutional order.

ECOWAS, as the regional organization directly concerned, has taken the lead in trying to bring about the return of the democratically-elected government of Sierra Leone. ECOWAS Foreign Ministers briefed members of the Security Council on 11 July and again on 19 September 1997. The ECOWAS Foreign Ministers also briefed me. Last week, President Kabbah and the Secretary General of the OAU met with me and urged Security Council support for the efforts of ECOWAS.

Repeated efforts by ECOWAS and other organizations since May 1997 to get the junta to stand down, have been met with a series of stalling and diversionary actions and the junta shows no signs of wanting to relinquish power. To the contrary, the evidence is that the junta is planning for a prolonged stay in power. In the meantime, the population of Sierra Leone is bearing the brunt of the situation caused by the illegal coup.

Efforts for the peaceful resolution of the situation and for the junta to stand down deserve the support of the Security Council and the international community. In this connection, the sanctions imposed by ECOWAS and the corresponding support requested of the Security Council, may be seen as measures intended to promote a peaceful resolution of the situation. I am confident that the Council will wish to lend its support to measures which it considers conducive to a peaceful outcome.

At stake is a great issue of principle, namely, that the efforts of the international community for democratic governance, grounded in the rule of law and respect for human rights, shall not be thwarted through illegal coups.

(Signed) Kofi A. ANNAN